

University of Toronto

Faculty of Music

FACULTY ARTISTS SERIES

20TH CENTURY AMERICAN SONGFEST MUSIC FOR PIANOS AND VOICES

Hosts

John Greer & Che Anne Loewen, piano

Singers

Sally Dibblee, soprano

Marcia Swanston, mezzo-soprano

Dennis Giesbrecht, tenor

Peter Barnes, baritone

William Aide & John Hawkins, piano



Saturday, March 19, 1994

8 pm

Walter Hall

Edward Johnson Building

PROGRAMME

Quodlibet on American Folktunes (1957)

(The Fancy Blue Devil's Breakdown)

Ingolf Dahl

(1912 - 1970)

William Aide, John Greer, John Hawkins, Che Anne Loewen, piano

Four Dialogues (1954)

The Subway

The Airport

The Apartment

In Spain and in New York

Ned Rorem

(b. 1923)

words by Frank O'Hara

Sally Dibblee, soprano

Dennis Giesbrecht, tenor

John Greer and Che Anne Loewen, piano

Souvenirs (1952)

Waltz

Schottische

Pas de deux

Two step

Hesitation - Tango

Galop - Coda

Samuel Barber

(1910 - 1981)

John Greer and Che Anne Loewen, piano

INTERMISSION

Overture to *Candide*

Leonard Bernstein

(1918 - 1990)

arr. for two pianos by John Greer

John Greer and Che Anne Loewen, piano

Arias and Barcarolles (1989)

Leonard Bernstein

Prelude

Love Duet

Little Smary

The Love of My Life

Greeting

Oif mayn Khas'neh (*At my Wedding*)

Mr. and Mrs. Webb Say Goodnight

Nachspiel

Peter Barnes, baritone

Marcia Swanston, mezzo soprano

John Greer and Che Anne Loewen, piano

Israfel from *Songfest*

Leonard Bernstein

arr. John Greer

Peter Barnes, baritone

Sally Dibblee, soprano

Dennis Giesbrecht, tenor

Marcia Swanston, mezzo soprano

John Greer and Che Anne Loewen, piano



Quodlibet on American Folk Tunes
("The Fancy Blue Devil's Breakdown")

Ingolf Dahl

Ingolf Dahl was born in Germany and studied in Cologne and Zürich before settling in the United States. He was an active conductor and composer and by 1945 had been assistant professor at the University of California.

This *Quodlibet*, or light-hearted, polyphonic interweaving of well-known but incongruous melodies, is in three parts. The outer two sections are in lively "hoe down" tempo, combining four fiddle reels including *Arkansas Traveler* and *Turkey in the Straw* with a sweet Tennessee hills melody, *The Deep Blue Sea*. The contrasting middle section is a sensitive setting of the ambling cowboy ballad *California Joe*. Throughout, Dahl makes excellent use of the eight independent hands to create imaginative and exciting texture, featuring his distinctive penchant for free dissonant counterpoint.

Four Dialogues

Ned Rorem

About his *Four Dialogues* Ned Rorem says, "...Frank O'Hara conceived the words to *The Quarrel Sonata* (as he first called it) expressly to be set by me for the unique combination of two voices and two pianos. This was accomplished early in 1954, mostly in Paris and London... Our glib non-poetry and vulgar music...in their comic-book tightness, pre-dated Pop Art by a decade. Not as Pop Art, however, so much as vaudeville is my feeling for these dialogues. The form is strict sonata whose four sections relate the old comedy of boy meets girl. The meeting is on the subway whose mechanism is evoked by the instruments while the voices flirt noisily. The second scene is in a car parked at an airport where the pianos waltz lazily while the soprano yields to the tenor. Without pause the third number unleashes a conjugal fight denoted by keyboards clattering, lady screaming, man grumbling. Finally they separate and from Spain to New York sing over the ocean to each other, wondering at love, at jealousy, at what to do now. But all ends in silence."

Rorem himself encourages the performers towards a theatrical presentation with many specific and amusing directions some of which we have attempted to incorporate, but despite its campy, often ridiculous nature, there is a core of truth and believability about the *Dialogues*, and some very genuinely and surprisingly moving moments.

Souvenirs

Samuel Barber

Of the six dances that form *Souvenirs* Barber writes, "In 1952 I wrote this suit of piano duets to play with a friend. Later I orchestrated it for concert use and several ballet companies have danced it, to various choreographies. ...I...have imagined a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York; the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos. *Souvenirs* - remembered with affection, not with irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness."

Of all the movements, the *Hesitation-Tango* is perhaps the most unique and distinctive. The others all pay unashamed homage to Delibes, Offenbach and, especially in the *Waltz* and *Pas se Deux*, to Tchaikowsky. This version for two pianos was arranged by the duo team of Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale with Barber's approval.

Overture to Candide

Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein's operetta adaptation of Voltaire's satirical novelette *Candide* made its Broadway debut on December 1, 1956. The action-packed plot attacks with wit and humour the philosophy of blind optimism. Bernstein's original literary collaborators were Lillian Hellman, Richard Wilbur, John Latouche and Dorothy Parker.

The famous overture is in the traditional binary form. After a short fanfare and flourish, the first theme group begins with a brilliant, effervescent tune unique to the overture which is then augmented by various short, brash musical ideas which later in Act I accompany the earthquake and the Auto de Fe. The lyrical second theme eventually becomes the love duet for the hero and heroine Candide and Cunegonda. The coda is borrowed from Cunegonda's dazzling coloratura aria *Glitter and be Gay*.



President Eisenhower once remarked to Bernstein after hearing him conduct a Gershwin composition, "You know, I liked that last piece you played; it's got a theme, I like music with a theme, not all them arias and barcarolles." Doubtless Bernstein was as impressed by the President's refreshing candour as he was appalled by his low-brow crassness, but he was always drawn to these dualities, especially when they flaunt convention, and this unique cycle of songs with its somewhat indulgent and personal eclecticism reflects this aspect of his personality.

The *Prelude* immediately establishes an edgy tone by contrasting brutal rhythms and sonorities to an impassive reference to love by the two singers. In *Love Duet* the two "lovers" spar and muse playfully with one another (in quintuple metre!), hinting at deeper issues under the surface. The solo *Little Smary* is supposedly a verbatim retelling of one of Bernstein's mother Jennie's bed-time stories, with a very Straussian musical ending. Twelve-tone techniques give the baritone solo *The Love of My Life* an obsessive, paranoid quality, and Bernstein pointedly quotes the opening motif of *Tristan und Isolde* at the words, "So that was is it, huh?" *Greeting* was inspired by the birth of the composer's son Alexander. *Oif mayn Khas'neh* ("At My Wedding") is also based on a tone row, and deals with a different sort of passion. It's based on a Yiddish poem by Yankev Yitskhok Segal, translated by Michael Barrett:

At my wedding a carefree, red-haired musician
played on the smallest, quietest fiddle.
He played a sad tune, and old, primitive,
unknown song. The old musicians were struck dumb.
"Where did this red-haired boy learn that?
Well, after all, he spends his nights and days
in small villages and plays at all-night gentile
drinking parties. And, after all, he can barely
read a line of Hebrew.
Sleeping? He sleeps on a hard mat.
Eating? He eats wherever he happens to be.
A *shikse* gives him radishes from her garden . . .

But it was a wonder, a miracle, just to look at him.
His shoulders and his head, and his nose and ears,
magically laughed within him with joy and sadness.
And his entire thin, bony face welled up
like a living spring.
At my wedding this boy played, and people
were raised up out of their seats.
Feet wanted to tear away, ears were sharpened
like spears. And the little fiddle kissed, tore,
and bit. And went too far, cutting our taut
heart-strings till they bled.
"Azh!" the old ones prayed, "Have mercy!"

Mr. and Mrs. Webb say Goodnight is an affectionate portrait of the Dean of the Indiana School of Music, Charles Webb, his wife Kendra and his two sons Malcolm and Kent, portrayed here by the pianists. The scene takes place in the middle of the night, when the nervous song-play of the sleepless boys sends their tightly-wound mother off on a tirade which her husband with patience and resourcefulness manages to quell. The final *Nachspiel* extends and sustains the feeling of newfound serenity, and is a reworking of one of Bernstein's earlier solo piano pieces, *Anniversaries*. All texts unless indicated otherwise were written by the composer.

Israfil (from *Songfest*)

Leonard Bernstein

To celebrate America's bi-centennial, Bernstein wrote *Songfest*, a twelve-movement cycle of American poems for six singers and orchestra. *Israfil* is the last of these movements and the title refers to the Moslem angel of music who will blow the trumpet on Judgment Day, and who despises an unimpassioned song. The inspired text is by Edgar Allen Poe:

Israfel

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
 'Whose heart-strings are a lute'.
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell).
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
 Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
 In her highest noon,
 The enamoured moon
Blushes with love,
 While, to listen, the red levin
 (With the rapid Pleiads, even,
 Which were seven,)
 Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir
 And other listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
 By which he sits and sings --
The trembling living wire
 Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,
 Where deep thoughts are a duty,
Where Love's grown-up God,
 Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty,
 Which we worship in a star.

Therefore, thou art not wrong,
 Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassioned song;
To thee the laurels belong,
 Best bard, because the wisest!
Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit --
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
 With the fervour of thy lute --
Well may the stars be mute!

John Greer is an active accompanist, vocal coach, composer and arranger, and is heard in these capacities throughout Canada and abroad, in recital and on various CBC broadcasts. He is an honoured music graduate of both the University of Manitoba School of Music where he studied piano and composition with Boyd McDonald and of the University of Southern California where he was a student of pianists Gwendolyn Koldofsky and Brooks Smith and harpsichordist Malcolm Hamilton.

As a faculty member of the University of Toronto opera division Mr. Greer made his conducting debut in 1983. He has conducted numerous operas there including *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Gianni Schicchi*, Tchaikowsky's *Iolanta* and Massenet's *Le Portrait de Manon*, as well as works for Victoria's Opera Piccola, Ottawa's Opera Lyra, the Banff School of Fine Arts, the Toronto Gilbert and Sullivan Society and Mirvish Productions. He was chorusmaster for the Canadian Opera Company's 1989 productions of *Un Ballo in Maschera* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and assistant conductor for their 1990 production of *Suor Angelica*.

Mr. Greer's most recent compositions include *Sing Me at Midnight*, a new song cycle based on poems by Wilfred Owen and written for baritone Kevin McMillan, *Palm Court Songs of the Bubble Ring*, written for the Amici Trio and featuring tenor Mark Dubois, *A Sarah Binks Songbook* and a children's opera based on H. C. Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, commissioned by the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus as part of their twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations last season, scheduled for a revival this spring by the CCOC at the DuMaurier Theatre, Harbourfront. He also continues his long association with the University of Toronto and Opera Hamilton.

Che Anne Loewen, originally from Manitoba, is a gold medal graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University where she studied piano with Garth Beckett. Her aptitude for accompanying led her to the University of Southern California where she studied accompanying with Gwendolyn Koldofsky and Brooks Smith and received the award for outstanding accompanist upon her Master's graduation. She had been based in Toronto since 1982 and her professional experience includes many performances in Toronto, Canada and Europe. She has worked as coach and accompanist at the Banff School of Fine Arts, the Elora Festival and the Ottawa Summer Vocal Academy.

She is equally at home partnering singers and instrumentalists and has played many times on CBC radio in both chamber and art song performances. A compact disc recorded with Guy Few, trumpet will be released later this year. In addition to accompanying and teaching, Ms. Loewen enjoys volunteer work and is presently serving as Chair of the Music Committee at University Settlement House. Ms. Loewen is associated with both Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Toronto, where she teaches Lyric Diction and Piano/Vocal Masterclasses.

Soprano **Sally Dibblee** received her Bachelor of Music degree from Mount Allison University and is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto's Opera Division. She has sung with Opera Hamilton and at the Banff Centre for the Fine Arts and also performed as a concert soloist with the Bach-Elgar Choir and the Elmer Iseler Singers. Currently, Ms. Dibblee is a member of the Ensemble Studio of the Canadian Opera Company where she made her stage debut as Frasquita in *Carmen*. She has performed other roles with the COC Studio, the Toronto Operetta Theatre and Peterborough Symphony. Next season's roles include Musetta in *La Boheme* with the COC and Frasquita in *Carmen* with the Manitoba Opera. Ms. Dibblee appears courtesy of Hart/Murdock Artists Management.

Marcia Swanston has established herself as a multi-faceted young Canadian mezzo-soprano at ease in a wide range of operatic recital and concert repertoire. After completing a Bachelor of Music Degree in her native Alberta, Ms. Swanston attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, England and the Britten Pears School, Aldeburgh, Suffolk. A well seasoned concert singer, Ms. Swanston has appeared frequently with the Aldeburgh Connection and in recital as well as in a variety of Gilbert and Sullivan and "POP" evenings. She has sung with the Edmonton, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Lethbridge and McGill Symphony Orchestras as well as operatic performances with the Canadian Opera Company, Pacific Opera, Edmonton Opera, Calgary Opera, Opera Lyra and at the Elora Festival. Ms. Swanston appears courtesy of Dean Artists Management.

Tenor **Dennis Giesbrecht** began his operatic career singing with the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble for whom he sang many roles such as Hoffmann, Don Ramiro, Alfredo and Peter Quint. Since that time he appeared with the major opera companies of Canada in standard repertoire roles as well as performing new works. Along with various tours of Great Britain and the Continent, Mr. Giesbrecht's European credits include Paolino in the Opera de Chambre de Geneve production of *Il Matrimonio Segreto*. Coupled with his operatic commitments, Mr. Giesbrecht maintains an active involvement in concert and oratorio performance, counting over 50 oratorios in his repertoire. He has been heard at Roy Thompson Hall and on CBC Radio, with the Toronto Symphony, Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, various choral groups and at many choral festivals.

Born in Winnipeg, **Peter Barnes** is a versatile baritone with a reputation for outstanding performances in opera, oratorio, concert, and theatre. He graduated from the University of Toronto Opera Division in 1985, and since then has appeared with opera companies and orchestras from coast to coast. His achievements include honours in the "Du Maurier Search for Stars", the National Bach Aria Competition, and the CBC Young Performers' Competition. Presently, Mr. Barnes is a cast member of the *The Phantom of the Opera*, and his busy schedule includes teaching singing at the University of Toronto.

Pianist **William Aide** received his musical degrees from the University of Toronto and the Juilliard School of Music. He is noted not only as a solo recitalist, but also as a chamber musician and accompanist. Mr. Aide has premiered concerti by many Canadian composers. He came to the music faculty at the University of Toronto in 1978 and currently serves as Chairman of the Keyboard Division.

Born in Montreal, **John Hawkins** received his musical education at the Conservatoire de Musique et d'Art Dramatique and at McGill University. He studied piano with Lubka Kolessa and composition with Istvan Anhalt. He is currently Professor of Theory and Composition at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto and is a member of the Graduate Department of Music.



